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SOCIETY

Hussein holds open his door to peace

If King Hussein of Jordan has a key to an Arab-Israeli settlement, then anyone listening to him at the State Department's black-tie dinner that was held in his honor Wednesday night might consider the locked doorway inching open.

King Hussein, who met earlier in the day with President Reagan, spoke of the the possibility of a "Jordanian-Palestinian confederation" no less than four times during his after-dinner toast.

In his first reference to such a confederation, he said Wednesday's discussions and the dinner "count toward much which we have achieved and toward which we've tried to achieve." He urged quick action.

His "working" White House luncheon earlier that day had been followed by meetings with numerous American officials, including Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and the president's national security adviser, Robert McFarlane.

During this working visit, King Hussein is reported to have urged President Reagan for negotiations under the "umbrella" of an international conference that would include the Soviet Union and China. The United States, however, continues to support direct talks between Israel and Arab nations.

Jordan's "continued and sustained effort . . . toward the establishment of a peace based on justice," the king said, focuses on United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.

The king had noted earlier at the White House that Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization are willing to negotiate on the basis of these resolutions. These U.N. recommendations also are the basis of U.S. policy but have been opposed by the PLO.

Before dealing with the PLO, however, the U.S. administration wants direct and unequivocal con-

firmation from the group that it recognizes Israel's right to exist, as called for in the U.N. resolutions.

"In essence, what he's saying," said one State Department official at the dinner, "is, 'I am offering you peace if you give me land occupied since the '67 War.'"

It is probably no coincidence that the chief of Jordanian forces, Gen. Zeid Bin Shaker, sat next to Gen. John Vessey Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and CIA director William Casey at the dinner, in light of Jordan's desire to renew a proposed arms sale withdrawn months ago under congressional pressure.

"We talked about their military needs," commented Mr. Weinberger at the State Department dinner about his meeting earlier that day with King Hussein, "and the opportunity for him to explore all of the problems in the region."

The defense secretary described Jordan's military needs as "great, very great."

Mr. McFarlane said, at the dinner, that Mr. Hussein's role in the negotiating process "took courage."

"His Majesty," the national security adviser said, "is taking tremendous risks in what he has committed here: a direct negotiation between Israel and Jordan in a non-belligerent fashion. Meaning no war. And we have to support him however we can."

Is the king — a direct descendant of the prophet Muhammad and grandson to the Jordanian monarch that led the Arab Revolt — seen by the United States government as a symbol of hope for peace in the Middle East? A bridge between the past and the future?

"Quite a lot," replied Mr. McFarlane. "Today took a lot of courage. We'll see how it plays out."

The official reason for King Hussein's visit to the United States was to see his son, Prince Faisal, graduate from Brown University.

— Lisa McCormack